

श्रीः

BHAGAVAN RAMANUJA



Price

Rs 15/-

BHAGAVAN RAMANUJA

His Life and Teachings

19.2.11

R. PADMANABHAN, B.A., B.T.



Publishers :

THE LITTLE FLOWER CO.

New No. 36, North Road, West C.I.T. Nagar, Chennai - 600 035.

LIFCO Books can also be had from :

Chennai :

LIFCO ASSOCIATES,

Narayana Apartments, 23/G-5, Rameswaram Road,
(near Mambalam Rly. Stn.), T. Nagar, Chennai-600 017.

M. DAMODARAM & CO.,

15, Umpherson St., G.T., Chennai-600 108.

Trichy :

THE LITTLE FLOWER CO.,

17/1, Nandhikoil Street, Teppakulam, Trichy-620 002.

HIGGINBOTHAMS AND AT ALL LEADING BOOKSELLERS

©THE LITTLE FLOWER CO.

Second Edition : 1978

Third Edition. : 2006

Printed at Sankar Printers (P) Ltd, Chennai

CONTENTS

| | <i>Page</i> |
|---|-------------|
| 1. Religious Revival before the Advent of Sri Ramanujacharya | 1 |
| 2. Birth and Early Life | 6 |
| 3. In Yadavaprakasa's Academy | 10 |
| 4. Ramanuja and Yamunacharya | 15 |
| 5. Ramanuja Turns a Sanyasin | 17 |
| 6. Ramanuja's First Disciples | 21 |
| 7. Ramanuja's Triumph over Yajnamurthy | 26 |
| 8. Sri Bhashya—His Masterpiece | 29 |
| 9. His Digvijaya | 32 |
| 10. Persecution and Flight | 37 |
| 11. Ramanuja and Vishnuvardhana—I | 41 |
| 12. Ramanuja and Vishnuvardhana—II | 46 |
| 13. His Last Days | 53 |
| 14. His Works and their Greatness | 58 |
| Chief Events in Ramanuja's Life and Their Dates | 71 |
| A List of the Names and Styles Conferred on Ramanuja | 72 |
| Bibliography | 72 |

PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION

यदा यदा हि धर्मस्य न्लानिर्भवति भारत! ।
अस्युत्थानमधर्गस्य तदात्मानं सूजास्यहम् ॥

“ Whenever there is a dangerous diminution of righteousness and a threatening upsurge of unrighteousness, I manifest myself.”

— *The Bhagavadgita.*

In the religious history of our hoary and holy Bharata-varsha, it was a bleak period when the people were generally confused and most often misled by the vicious preachings of non-Vedic religions and by philosophies, that interpreted Upanishadic teachings incorrectly and unrealistically. And to stem the rot that had set in, in the religious life of the people, was then born Sri Ramanuja in Sriperumbudur, as the God-gifted son of Sri Asuri Kesavacharya and Kanthimathi, in the Tamil month of Chittirai, Suklapaksha Panchami, in the year of Pingala (Saka 939) and on a Thursday.

He is severally held to be the incarnation of the Five Divine Missiles (Panchayudha) of Sriman Narayana, of Vishvaksena, the Commander-in-chief of Lord Vishnu and of Adisesha, His serpentine Couch. The concesus of opinion among the Vaishnavite Acharyas is definitely in favour of the thirdmentioned belief. *Sri Venkatesetihasa Mala* of Tirumalai Ananthazhvan, *Tatiraja Vaibhava* of Vatuha Nambi, a devoted disciple of Sri Ramanuja and “*Divyasuricharita*” a Mahakavya by Garudavahana Panditha, one of the ardent pupils of Sri Ramanuja, state in no ambiguous terms, that the Tatiraja was but the incarnation of Ananta or Adisesha. A Sanskrit verse observes that Adisesha incarnated as

Lakshmana, (in Tretayuga) as Balarama (in Dvaparayuga) and as Ramanuja in Kaliyuga.

अनन्तः प्रथमं रूपं लक्ष्मणस्तु ततः परम् ।

बलभद्रस्तृतीवस्तु कलौ रामानुजः स्मृतः ॥

Sri Ramanuja, the glorious founder of that great realistic philosophy of Sri Visishtadvaita wrote only nine works (nine gems!) which, though very small quantitatively, were very great qualitatively. He wrote only in Devabhasha, the Language of the gods and preferred prose to verse, probably, to be easily understood even by the layman who did not know much Sanskrit.

Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru has remarked in one of his writings that Ramanuja was emotional while Sánkara was intellectual. This statement is not true. A perusal of the works of Sri Ramanuja can convince anyone of the fact that he is as much intellectual as Sankara. But then, Nehru is certainly right in calling Sri Ramanuja emotional. For, whenever he has to speak of Srimat Narayana and His Vaikuntha, he simply bursts into emotionally rapturous ecstasy:

The one striking feature of this divine soul is that he is absolutely free from ego with regard to his divine birth and high attainments in the realm of spiritual knowledge. The overwhelming love for his fellow-beings which did not permit of any consideration of caste and creed is yet another noble characteristic of his. The “Guruparampara” refers to his having invited Tirukkacchi Nambi, a Vaisya by birth, to breakfast with him. And there is the momentous incident of his having revealed in public the Mulamantra and explaining its significance to the citizens of Tirukkottiyur, despite the pointed prohibition of this act by his Preceptor, Tirukkottiyur Nambi, who initiated him into the mystery of this Mantra. (It may be mentioned here that Sri Ramanuja's devotion to and reverence for his Gurus was boundless.)

We are now on the threshold of the nine-hundred and sixty-second year of the incarnation of this high-souled Acharya, reverentially called "Udayavar", whose personal magnetism inspired his countless countrymen with profound God-love and weaned them away from the evil-clutches of atheism and infidelity. That, by the Divine Will or Sankalpa of Sriman Narayana, we, who have been continuously and constantly striving our best to widen the horizon of knowledge and of Devotion have been privileged to reprint the present book, on the eve of our Golden Jubilee Year gives us no small spiritual satisfaction and sense of fulfilment.

श्रीमद्रामानुजाचार्यचरितस्य प्रकाशनात् ।
‘लिफ्को’ संस्थापनं धर्मं भक्तिज्ञानप्रवर्धकम् ॥

Prof. R. K. Parthasarathi, M.A., L.T.,
Dip. in French and German,
Professor of Sanskrit (Rtd.),
Hon. Literary Adviser,
LIFCO Publishers.

INTRODUCTION

The Vedantic School consists of three main divisions, whose founders, as we all know, are the great philosophers Sankaracharya, Ramanujacharya, and Madhvacharya. All these great thinkers are Vedantins in the sense that they follow the teachings of the Upanishads although differing in their interpretation thereof. The Advaita system evolved by Sankara and Visishtadvaita system propounded by Ramanuja are of considerable antiquity and popularity. Several great scholars have accepted their teachings and have become their disciples.

Although it is nearly nine centuries since Sri Ramanuja attained Moksha, no regular and correct biography of the great Acharya has been available to the public, in general and to the youth, in particular. So far our youngsters in schools and Colleges have not been provided with any authentic book of biography like that of St. Paul or of St. Ignatius Loyola. Indian children, chiefly Hindu children, have had no systematic knowledge of Hindu philosophers and Men of God, except for some scrappy information on them included in history-books.

A short biography of Bhagavan Sri Ramanuja and his teachings is, therefore, an urgent necessity — a *sine qua non*. Sri Ramanuja has a claim to greatness, as a great Vaishnava preacher, who expounded the philosophical system known as Visishtadvaita which is but Vaishnava Siddhanta and which must really be traced to the great and blessed Azhvars who preceded him.

Sri Ramanuja was a great reformer too, and he wanted to transform life and people all over India. Although

Ramanand and Chaitanya Mahaprabhu did not owe anything directly and precisely to Sri Ramanuja's teachings or his works, we may not be far wrong in supposing that the Vaishnava Renaissance in North India was the result and product of the dynamic propagation of this faith in South India — the holy home of the Trinity of Acharyas.

In a book of this kind, it is not possible to deal with every aspect of the rich and glorious life of Sri Ramanuja and his many-sided activities. I have referred only to the chief events in the life of this extraordinary Philosopher and given a bird's-eye-view of the Acharya's unique philosophy.

If this little book succeeds in inspiring the minds of atleast a few of our youths, the author will consider himself more than amply rewarded for this labour of love.

My grateful thanks are due to The Little Flower Co. for reprinting the book in response to popular demand.

Vellore-632012, }
19-4-1978. }

R. Padmanabhan,
Author.

BHAGAVAN RAMANUJA

1. Religious Revival before the Advent of Sri Ramanujacharya

It is common knowledge that this world does not give permanent joy or satisfaction. If we only go to a big city and ask every individual and every inmate of a house or a mansion born to wealth and power, whether he is satisfied with his life, surely we will not get any one who will say 'yes'. Every person will have something to complain of, and being dissatisfied with his present position, he will try to improve his lot so that he may become more happy. Happiness, pure and simple, is indeed rare in this world.

The questions naturally arise: 'What can man do to escape from the misery of the world and get permanent happiness? Is death the end of all or do we live after death? What are we, and why are we created in this world?'

It is to solve questions such as these that religions have come into existence. Every religion says, 'only by following me and me alone and no other, you can get salvation.' One is rather perplexed to know which religion is correct and which to follow.

Each individual has to judge and follow a particular religion according to his own convictions. It is however his duty to see, scrutinise and decide and not follow blindly.

Among the important religions of the world, Hinduism occupies a prominent position. For one thing, it is a very ancient religion and secondly it has developed a unique system of philosophy which has pride of place in the modern world.

The philosopher who brings to prominence a particular system of religious thought and practice is called the founder of that philosophy. About 550 B.C., when speculation was active in other parts of the world, two systems of philosophy which developed into separate religions took shape in North India. These two systems—Buddhism and Jainism—grew out of Brahminical Hinduism, as modified by the teachings of two noble Kshatriyas, Gautama Buddha and Mahavira respectively. Both the systems rely on the active support of an organisation of monks, and reject the authority of the Vedas, and teach the doctrine of respect for every form of animal life (ahimsa). Both have their holy Scriptures, doctrines and practices.

Unlike Jainism, Buddhism spread rapidly all over India, thanks to the powerful patronage of Asoka and Kanishka. After some ages of success, Buddhism, gradually died out. However, it

flourishes abundantly in Ceylon, Burma, Tibet, Thailand, Mongolia, China and Japan. The Hindu revival during the Gupta period, justly regarded as the Golden Age of Northern India, was also responsible for the decay of Buddhism. Brahminical Hinduism came to be the dominant faith and the Gupta Emperors encouraged Vaishnavism. That great change was accompanied by a freer and wider use of Sanskrit, in books and inscriptions.

The revival of Hinduism with the parallel decay of the Buddhist faith continued in the seventh century A.D.

The Hindu reaction against Buddhism was carried on more vigorously in the 8th century by Kumarila-Bhatta, who taught the Mimamsa Philosophy. In the 9th century, he was followed by the great intellectual, Sri Sankaracharya, who expounded his Advaita Philosophy in a masterly fashion. He travelled throughout India, and established several Mutts (or monasteries) many of which exist even today, the principal Mutt being at Sringeri in Mysore.

Under the inspiration of his master Govindapada, Sankara at the age of sixteen, re-interpreted the three Great Scriptures, the Sruthi, the Bhagavad Gita, and the Brahma Sutras. His revolutionary interpretation of the Scriptures was a challenge to Buddhism and Jainism as well as to the conflicting

Hindu cults and the gross worldliness which the crisis of the spirit had caused.

Sankaracharya had not only taught a new doctrine, but also wanted to transform life too. His was a dynamic personality and his Advaita Philosophy still has a great following.

The religious revival in South India really began in the seventh century A.D. mostly during the reign of the great Pallavas of Kanchi. Saivism and Vaishnavism began to spread under the dynamic teachings of the Saiva Nayanmars and the Vaishnava Azhvars. It was in this way that the great Pallavas embellished Mahabalipuram. Namakkal, Trichinopoly and other places with beautiful cave-temples, carved out of single boulders of stone and sculptures.

Vaishnavism, must really be traced to the Azhvars who preceded Sri Ramanujacharya. The Bhakti cult expounded in the hymns of the great Azhvars gave impetus to the growth of Vaishnavism. After the Azhvars and before the advent of Sri Ramanuja, there arose a number of Vaishnava philosophers, who presumably followed the doctrines that go now by the name of the Ramanuja School. One of the philosophers worth mentioning is *Nathamuni*, the learned Vaishnava scholar who lived at Srirangam in the beginning of the 10th century A.D. He was one of the early Vaishnava

scholars of repute who spread the Bhagavata or the Pancharatra cult in the south and laid the foundation for the spread of Vaishnavism. Like Sankāra, his travels extended to the distant Badrinath in the North, Dvaraka in Kathiawar and Jagannath on the eastern coast.

This great teacher had a respectable following of disciples, the most important of them being *Pundarikāksha*, who lived in the latter part of the 9th century. Pundarikaksha had a famous disciple called *Ramamisra* who is chiefly remembered as the spiritual teacher of *Yamunacharya*, the grandson of Nathamuni. Yamunacharya was doubtless a scholar, properly educated in the Vaishnava school of thought of the day. He gloried in the title of *Mahabhashya Bhatta* or Master of Sanskrit Grammar. Like Ramanuja after him, he gave up his life as a householder, and donning the dress of a sanyasin, pledged himself wholly to a spiritual life. Taking up his residence at Srirangam, he led a life of renunciation, composing philosophical works, expounding the doctrines of the Visishtadvaita Philosophy to audiences, worshipping the great Lord, and commanding worship from all his devotees. Yamunacharya, otherwise called Alavandar, died about 1040 A.D., having expressed an earnest wish to see Ramanuja established at Srirangam as the defender of the Vaishnava faith.

2. Birth and Early Life

So long as Vaishnavism lives, so long as Ramanuja's brilliant commentaries on the Vedanta Sutras and the Gita live, it is certain that his name will be remembered not only by the people of India but also by the world. By his keenness of intellect, vastness of philosophical learning, and sincerity and seriousness of character, he made history in South India. His work on the practical side was epoch-making. The Vaishnavite temples that were built during his time are even to this day centres of social and religious influence. His energetic religious activity bore fruit even outside South India.

Who was this great intellect from South India who strode like a colossus all over India, converting a king to Vaishnavism in one place and defeating his opponents in open controversies in another? This great man from South India was *Ramanujacharya*, the great Master and Defender of Vaishnavism and an incarnation of Adisesha.

Yamunacharya, also called Alavandar, had a disciple named Srisailapurna who was in the service of the Lord of the Seven Hills at Tirupathi. He had two sisters, one of whom Kanthimati was married to one Kesava Somayajiar of Sriperumbudur, about ten miles from the Trivellore Railway Station near Madras. This lady gave birth to Ramanuja in the month of Chitra in *Saka* 939, *i.e.*, 1017 A.D.

His uncle, Sri Sailapurna, on receiving the good news, hurried down the hills to Sriperumbudur and was impressed with the sweet and intelligent face of the child. The child appeared to him to be as intelligent as Sri Rama's brother, Lakshmana, that he gave him the same name. So the child came to be called Lakshmana or Ramanuja.

Astrologers cast his horoscope and remarked that the child would be an intellectual genius and a unique preacher of religion.

The birth of the child in a family famous for learning for generations was as important a factor as his inborn genius; for, they both contributed to his unrivalled scholarship.

Srisailapurna looked after Ramanuja carefully and when the time came for the ceremony of purification, namely the investiture of the sacred Yajnopavita, he got him duly invested with the sacred thread.

Even as a boy, Ramanuja mastered the Scriptures under the care of his father and uncle and exhibited his great intellectual capacities. The Vaishnava scholars soon came to regard him as a great genius and recognised in him all the signs of the superman.

His Marriage

By this time, Ramanuja had attained the age

of sixteen and his father thought fit that Ramanuja should get married. Accordingly a girl named Tanjam Ammal was selected from a family very well known to Somayajiar and his wife, and married to Ramanuja. The girl was without doubt sweet and of a gentle disposition. Young and fresh, she was supremely happy in her husband's household.

Death of Kesava Somayajiar

Ramanuja's father died not very long after his sons's marriage. He passed away much to Ramanuja's grief. Ramanuja performed the funeral ceremony in honour of his father at Sriperumbudur. His father's sudden death was certainly a great shock to him. However, he succeeded in regaining his calm to console his bereaved mother.

In spite of his father's death, Ramanuja remained undaunted and wished to continue his studies in the Vedanta. He was ever thinking of the Vedas and Brahma Sutras and eagerly wished to enter an academy, where he could obtain true knowledge and enlightenment. He was in search of a professor who could very well appreciate his keen intellect and amazing logic.

3. In Yadavaprakasa's Academy

Ramanuja did not wait long. There was a religious teacher of some renown at a place called

Tiruputkuzhi, very near Kanchi. He was *Yadavaprakasa*, who was very well learned in the Advaita philosophy and was running an academy for training youths.

Ramanuja went to Yadavaprakasa and requested to be admitted into his academy. Here, he was joined by a cousin of his, named Govinda, another nephew of Srisailapurna, and the two, as was the fashion of the day, boarded with the professor, and acquired mastery in the Scriptures. Of all the pupils, Ramanuja was the best. His extraordinary intelligence, sharp wit and energy filled his teacher and fellow-students with wonder and admiration. He excelled others by his arguments and awlays gained his view-point in disputations.

One day they were all studying the Upanishads. The master, Yadavaprakasa, was explaining a passage contrary to its true meaning and significance. Being somewhat arrogant, he twisted the passage in order to suit his viewpoint, and explained it in a pompous style. Such was the skill and ability of Ramanuja that he at once refuted the contention of his professor and explained the spirit of the passage in the best way possible. His expressions were the index of his inward character; everything that he said denoted energy and reason. In consequence of the controversy, there arose a coolness between the master and the pupil. It is said that the

teacher became jealous of Ramanuja, and in collusion with his other pupils, planned to take Ramanuja on a long journey to Kasi and get him drowned in the Ganga, if possible.

Ramanuja, without suspecting his master, readily joined the pilgrim party and travelled as far as the outskirts of the Vindhya. It was then that the news of the nefarious intention was made known to him by his cousin, who asked him to escape.

Ramanuja reached a forest, and by sheer chance, met a hunter and his wife and inquired of them the way to Kanchi. They replied that they were travelling to Kanchi (called Satyavratha Kshetra) and asked him to follow them. Travelling all through the night, the three reached a place in the morning when the hunter asked Ramanuja to fetch water from a well closeby. When Ramanuja returned with some water, he found that the hunter and his wife had disappeared mysteriously. On asking the neighbouring people where he was, Ramanuja learnt to his great wonder that he was at Kanchi itself. "Surely the ways of Providence are inscrutable!" he said to himself. Very soon he hurried to his native place and joined his family.

In course of time, Yadavaprakasa and his pupils returned to Kanchi after their pilgrimage. They were astonished to find Ramanuja, safe and sound, in his home. In spite of all the differences between

the master and the pupil, Ramanuja resumed his studies in the same academy.

How Ramanuja Exorcised an Evil Spirit

Very soon Ramuja became known, not merely as a learned young man, but also as a superman possessing divine powers. One day, there came an opportunity to exhibit his great divine powers which he later on used to spread his gospel. Behind all his divine gifts lay that purity and fulness of divine love that endeared him to all, even to his misguided enemies at the academy.

One day the King of the town summoned Yadavaprakasa to exorcise an evil spirit that possessed his daughter and refused to leave her in peace. Yadavaprakasa readily agreed to comply with the king's request and set out with all his pupils. Ramanuja too accompanied him to the king's palace.

On reaching the palace, Yadavaprakasa met the possessed daughter of the king and chanted some verses to exorcise the evil spirit. All his efforts were in vain. At last, the evil spirit burst forth and said, "O Yadavaprakasa! Know that you can never succeed in driving me out of this lady. That handsome youngman, your pupil, Ramanuja is alone capable of exorcising me. Let him place his sacred feet on my head and ask me to get away! If only

he does that, if only he should do that, I will be the most fortunate one in the world."

Immediately Ramanuja was summoned and asked to overpower the evil spirit. No sooner had he placed his foot on the lady's head and asked the spirit to leave the lady alone, than the wicked one bowed and left the woman's apartment and departed. Before its departure, it cried out: 'Yadavaprakasa! all your learning and philosophy could not overcome me! Know that this young Ramanuja has a rare spiritual power and super-human touch. He will be the saviour of the world!' This triumph of Ramanuja made his master more and more jealous and led to their separation in a short time. Already Yadavaprakasa's Advaitic interpretations and commentaries had displeased him very much. In such circumstances, Ramanuja had to give up his philosophical studies in the academy.

Soon afterwards, Ramanuja went to Satyavratha Kshetra (Kanchi) where he attached himself to the service of Lord Varadaraja. There he made friends with another great devotee of the Lord, named Kanchipurna, a non-Brahmin disciple of Yamunacharya. The ecstatic devotion of the one made an abiding impression on the other.

4. Ramanuja and Yamunacharya

The great teacher, Yamunacharya, had established himself as the Head of the Peetha and doing all he could to spread the philosophy of Visishtadvaita. He was getting old and looking out for a successor, who would carry on his mission. He believed that such a Mahapurusha would come at the proper time in order to save the world and lead the erring mankind along the paths of Dharma to salvation. During one of his visits to Kanchi, he had observed Ramanuja in the company of Yadavaprakasa. Ramanuja's appearance had so much struck him that he was convinced Ramanuja must be the person that he was in search of. As soon as he returned to Srirangam, he sent Mahapurna, one of his disciples, to go to Kanchi to bring Ramanuja to visit Srirangam and formally accept Visishtadvaita. This was in 1042 A.D.

The disciple reached Kanchi, and with the help of Kanchipurna, the great Vaishnava devotee, he succeeded in his object. He said to Ramanuja: 'My master wishes to inform you that he has long wished to meet you. It is his earnest wish that you should pay a visit to Srirangam as early as possible. I wish that you accompany me.'

Ramanuja who had heard of the illustrious Yamunacharya and his famous Gurus, gladly agreed to pay his respects and thanked the disciple

for the courtesy shown to him. The two then left Kanchi for Srirangam. In a few days they reached the northern banks of the river Cauvery, when lo! a large gathering of Vaishnavites was seen as if in mourning. Ramanuja was very much distressed in mind to see this.

The great teacher Yamunacharya was dead, and the congregation he saw was engaged in the funeral rites on the banks of the Cauvery. With great efforts he consoled himself and hastened to feast his eyes at least on the body of the great master, and was surprised to find that three fingers in his right hand were firmly closed. He asked one of the mourners if they were usually closed and whether the great teacher had any work left unfinished. He then replied that shortly before the Guru's death, the teacher had expressed three wishes, and had closed his fingers one by one in counting them. Ramanuja inquired of him what the three wishes were. He learnt the three were: a Visish-tadvaita Bhashya should be composed on Vyasa's Brahma Sutras and that the names of Parasara, the author of the Vishnupurana and of the great saint Nammazhvar (Satakopan) should be perpetuated as a mark of respect and gratitude to these great Vaishnavas. Deeply touched, Ramanuja assured the gathering that he would fulfil the three wishes of the late master as speedily as possible, by the grace of God. The next moment there was a

miracle! The fingers of the dead Yamunacharya stretched out, of their own accord! All those that had assembled there proclaimed in one voice: 'Our Saviour has come! This miracle is a sign of the greatness of this young man!' So early in his life, Ramanuja had become the central figure in Vaishnava hierarchy.

Having attended the funeral ceremonies of Yamunacharya, Ramanuja left Srirangam and reached Kanchi. He then resumed his duties there as before in the company of the great devotee, Kanchipurna.

5. Ramanuja Turns Sanyasin

Ramanuja, as we already know, was deeply impressed with the sincerity and saintly character of Kanchipurna, and he was drawn towards him. This companionship made Ramanuja ask Kanchipurna: "You are definitely a great devotee of the Lord; you are therefore fit to be my master and initiate me into the Visishtadvaita Philosophy. Will you be pleased to do so?" But Kanchipurna being a Vaisya by birth, replied, "Dear Ramanuja, it is not fit that you should ask me to be your Guru. It would be against the Sastras were I to become a teacher of a Brahmana. I may direct you to go to the great Guru, Mahapurna, and ask him to teach you all about Visishtadvaita Philosophy."

Having failed in his attempts to secure the great devotee as his master, he thought of inviting him to dinner in his house and thereby hoped to eat at least the refuse left on the leaf. Ramanuja accordingly gave instructions to his wife to prepare food for Kanchipurna. After his services at the temple, Kanchipurna went up to Ramanuja's house. As he had to attend to another urgent work, the devotee had his food at once and departed. On his return Ramanuja saw that his wife had removed the leaf on which the devotee had taken his food, washed the place and bathed herself once again to wash herself of the impurity. Ramanuja, the great friend and admirer of the Vaishnava devotee, felt greatly disappointed. He was very much vexed with his wife's behaviour and rebuked her for her misconduct. He firmly believed that they were ill-matched, and waited for the earliest opportunity to send her to her mother's house.

Before he turned a Sanyasin, it was only to be expected that he should be anxious to know more about the Vaishnava religion and its bold and high principles. Accordingly he left Kanchi for Srirangam on the advice of Kanchipurna to meet Mahapurna the foremost disciple of Yamunacharya, to get initiated into the Pancha Samskaras. Almost at the same time, the Vaishnavites of Srirangam pressed Mahapurna to find out a suitable successor to Yamunacharya and install him on the

Peetha. Mahapurna, who had heard enough of Ramanuja, promised to do so, and left Srirangam with his family for Kanchi. As if by good fortune, both of them met at Maduranthakam. Ramanuja who was anxious to work for the new cause, requested Mahapurna to initiate him into the Vaishnavite philosophy. Mahapurna took Ramanuja into the temple at Maduranthakam and there he taught him the sacred Manthra, Dvayam. Then they both came to Kanchi.

Mahapurna and his family were lodged in a place next to Ramanuja's and there grew a closer relationship between the two men. After six months or so, Ramanuja's wife picked up a quarrel with Mahapurna's wife. When Mahapurna came to know of this quarrel, he thought that the situation might become more complicated, and quietly left for Srirangam with his family immediately. When Ramanuja learnt of the sudden departure of Mahapurna, he found fault with his wife and severely rebuked her for her misbehaviour.

Soon there was another provocation which forced Ramanuja to turn a Sanyasin. A hungry Vaishnava came one day to the temple when Ramanuja was busy in the service of the Lord and asked him for food. Moved by the traveller's words, he advised him to go to his house nearby and take food. The traveller took Ramanuja at his word and went to

his house. And what was the traveller's disappointment! Ramanuja's wife was so impatient that she chided him, and bade him go away. She did not even care to ask him who had directed him to her house.

The weary traveller, however, returned to Ramanuja at the temple and told him that he could not get food in his (Ramanuja's) house. Ramanuja lost his patience and at once decided to send his wife to her mother's house for good. He, however, managed to feed the traveller at the temple itself.

Being thoroughly displeased with his wife's behaviour and pettiness of mind, he hurried home, and sent her away to her mother's house. He had finally resolved to abandon the householder's life and to turn a Sanyasin. The main purpose of his Sanyasa was two-fold; he was distracted from his services at the temple by his wife's bad behaviour and secondly, he had renounced the world in order to teach the Vaishnavas the need for asceticism in the service of the Lord which is one of the basic principles of Visishtadvaita school of thought.

After he had sent his wife away to her parents, he left home for good but not before his mother's death. He was determined to lead a pure Vaishnava life of personal asceticism and whole-hearted devotion to the Lord, which is still remembered

by posterity. He then went to the temple and there, with due ceremonics, he was given the Tridanda and the red robes of the Hindu Sanyasin. Since that day and hour, he broke all his family ties and came to be known as '*Ramanuja Muni*' or Saint Ramanuja. He also came to be known as *Yathiraja* by the grace of the Lord of Kanchi.

6. Ramanuja's First Disciples

From a complete isolation and exclusion from family life, Ramanuja acquired an extraordinary zeal to spread the gospel of Visishtadvaita. Sankara's Advaita philosophy, according to Ramanuja, did not enable the mass to understand his (Sankara's) abstract conception. People wanted a personal God and a kind and loving Deity, not a rigid, uncompromising Lord. Such a God was believed to be represented by Maha Vishnu, the Lord who evinced sympathy for one's sufferings and whose great interest in the welfare of all things by frequent descents on earth not only in the form of human beings but also of animals is well-known.

From the temple steps at Kanchi, Ramanuja practised the austere Sanyasin's life. He acquired a new fervour and a freeing of his spirit, filling him with pre-occupations. He conducted meetings and delivered sermons with enthusiasm. By preaching the universal love of Maha Vishnu for the

common man, he brought to one and all such a God as they were yearning for. He preached, by his persuasive eloquence, both in Samskrit and Tamil, the all-merciful fatherhood of Maha Vishnu and the all-loving motherhood of Lakshmi Goddess. The mind of the people was greatly impressed by his lectures and discourses.

A native of Kuram, a neighbouring village, was the first to be drawn to him. Kuresa, as he was called, came of a well-to-do and learned Brahmin family. He became a devotee, friend and a disciple of Ramanuja. Kandadai Mudaliyandan, his sister's son, was another who became his disciple, and remained with him for ever after. Other persons—Advaitins and Jains—became his disciples, and followed his teachings.

One of the scholars who became his disciple was Yadavaprakasa himself in whose academy Ramanuja had studied as a boy of sixteen. Through the services of Kanchipurna, Yadavaprakasa contacted Ramanuja who was working heart and soul for the cause of Vaishnavism. The young Ramanuja was becoming so conspicuous that Yadavaprakasa, persuaded of the error of his interpretations, and abandoning his Advaita doctrines, chose to be converted by his own pupil to the new faith. Ramanuja was persuaded by his other disciples to take Yadavaprakasa into their fold. So

the master converted Yadavaprakasa under the name of Govinda Jeeyar who proclaimed to the world that he was one of the ardent supporters of Ramanuja. Govinda Jeeyar, sometime later, composed a book called *Yathidharma Samucchaya*—a work on the work and duties of Sanyasins. We have no means of ascertaining whether this was the Advaitin Yadavaprakasa whom Ramanuja had defeated in a controversy.

After sometime, Ramanuja had a call from the Vaishnava community at Srirangam. Ramanuja readily complied with their request and accompanied by Kuresa and Mudaliyandan, started for Srirangam. Meanwhile Kuresa had decided to abandon his riches and to migrate to Srirangam with his family. There he lived an ascetic's life on the alms for which he begged everyday. It was also at this time that Govinda Bhattar, his cousin who had all the while been a staunch Advaitin, doing service in the Kalahasti Temple, announced his definite resolve to be converted to the Visishtadvaita way of life and thought. Ramanuja's uncle, Sri Sailapurna, brought about this conversion of Govinda Bhattar. Later on Govinda Bhattar joined Ramanuja, turned a Sanyasin like Ramanuja and became a chief disciple under the name of Embar. Ramanuja gave him his complete blessings and henceforward engaged him in several important missions.

Even before Ramanuja undertook these conversions, he had himself to learn more and more of Visishtadvaita doctrines and study the holy scriptures, after joining the Srirangam Mutt. He, in the course of his studies, attended to the task of reforming the temple worship and restoring order in the services of the temple and set right many errors in its management. Very soon the Lord invested him with the title *Udayavar*, by which name Ramanuja became famous in after years.

While at Srirangam, Ramanuja intensified his efforts to find instructions from the famous pupils of Yamunacharya—instructions as if they were specially intended for him alone. One of the ardent disciples of Yamunacharya, Goshtipurna knew the quintessence of Visishtadvaita philosophy. He would not easily initiate Ramanuja into the great secrets of Visishtadvaita. He had established himself at Tirukkottiyur and Ramanuja, for love of the important teachings, travelled up and down seventeen times in vain to learn from Goshtipurna. It was only at the eighteenth visit that Goshtipurna, after exacting promises of secrecy, condescended to impart instruction. Was it not the great perseverance and the magnetic vigour of Ramanuja's spirit that moved Goshtipurna at last? The world has not known such a combination of a thirst for knowledge and perseverance in one man.

Among other things, Ramanuja learnt the sacred eight-lettered Mahamantra which is the cornerstone of the Vaishnava Philosophy, and the famous Charama Sloka beginning with 'Sarvadharman'. The eight-lettered Mahamantra, the Dvaya Manthra and the Charama Sloka referred to are collectively called *Rahasyatraya*. When Ramanuja selected his band of followers (seventy four in number), he ordained that they should make *Rahasyatraya* known to the world and make it safe for the cause of Visishtadvaita.

Ramanuja, once in possession of the great teachings, wanted to proclaim loudly, the great truths he learned with so much difficulty. So great was the spirit of the reformer in him that he wanted to preach the truth to everybody in order to bring to the people a yearning for Maha Vishnu. 'Intense devotion to Maha Vishnu, and chanting the Mahamantra,' said Ramanuja, 'is the chief characteristic of the Visishtadvaita way of living.' Accordingly, he straightway summoned a gathering of Srivaishnavas and taught them the Mahamantra. When Goshtipurna heard of Ramanuja's action, he became red with anger and went to him to demand an explanation. He replied: 'Great master, I will not mind if perdition falls to my lot for my disobedience to you and breach of faith but I value the salvation of many other souls. I taught them in your name and placing your holy self in my heart,

I gave them your blessings.' In this way he changed the hearts of his conservative teachers and made them give up their narrow prejudices. He was responsible for bringing a reorientation in their outlook, and thereby he had more to teach them than they had to instruct him.

Such were Srisailapurna and others. The former gave Ramanuja discourses on the Rama-yana in the course of a visit for nearly a year which Ramanuja spent at Tirupati for the purpose.

It was in this way that Ramanuja converted thousands and thousands of people to Vaishnavism, and made it very popular and dynamic in several parts of South India. His stay at Srirangam may be regarded as the foundation of the greatest achievement of Vaishnava culture and ways of life.

7. Ramanuja's Triumph over Yajnamurthy

"Are you in earnest? Seize this very minute;
 What you can do, or dream, you begin it;
 Boldness has genius, power, and magic in it;
 Only engage, and then the mind grows heated;
 Begin; and then the work will be completed."

— GOETHE

Ramanuja, as the apostle of the Visishtadvaita, ruthlessly refuted Sankara's 'Mayavadism' in order to establish theism proper on the solid basis of the

Vedanta. Ramanuja established his views on the strength of the Vedas, and Upanishads and the Gita. The Tiruvaymozhi, as one of the works of Nammazhvar is called, contains the quintessence of the Brahmasutras and this work also had a great influence on Ramanuja and his teachings. Ramanuja stood for all these doctrines and his followers spread them among the masses. He was becoming more popular than ever on account of his teaching the people valuable religious truths in their mother tongue and asking them to live accordingly.

About this time, there was a Mayavadi Sanyasin, a Brahman named Yajamurthi who was well-learned but somewhat conceited and haughty. He went to Kasi and other places and established his fame as a Mayavadi Sanyasin. During his travels in South India, he heard of Ramanuja and his great popularity as a teacher of Vaishnava Philosophy. When he came to Srirangam with his followers, Yajnamurthy met Ramanuja and challenged him to establish the superiority of Visishtadvaita over the *Maya* doctrine to his satisfaction. Inspite of his pre-occupations, Ramanuja readily accepted the challenge. He, however, enquired of him what he proposed to do in case he was defeated. The Mayavadin summarily replied. 'Should I be defeated, I shall become your servant, and accept your faith.' Ramanuja agreed to do the same thing, should he be overcome by his rival.

Both agreed that they should pursue the controversy for eighteen days. Each explained his religious truths and tried to establish the superiority of his religion. Although they had discussed and explained for seventeen days, the position remained unchanged. Neither could overcome the other. At the end of the seventeenth day, the arrogant Sanyasin said to Ramanuja, 'You may go today. Come tomorrow and establish your supremacy, if you can, in speech and argument.'

Ramanuja, when he returned to the Mutt, prayed to the Lord to guide him the next day. The cause of Vaishnava Darsana must on no account be affected by this religious controversy. A heavenly voice asked him to meet Yajnamurthy the next day and bade him utter Yamunacharya's prayer condemning Mayavada when he would overcome his rival.

The next day, as directed by the Lord, Ramanuja followed by his disciples and friends, went to Yajnamurthy and challenged him. Ramanuja's face showed that he was assured of his success. His face was beaming with a brightness hitherto unknown; there was briskness in him; he seemed to have redoubled vigour. Before he could plunge himself into arguments and conclusions, the Mayavadi Sanyasin, losing courage and confidence, approached Ramanuja and declared, 'I accept

your views and so you have conquered me. May I request you to accept me as one of your followers so that I may imbibe the spirit of your practical exposition of the Vedanta and interpretation?"

Accordingly Ramanuja converted the Mayavadi scholar and made him his disciple under the name and style of Devarajamuni. Subsequently the disciple became a great exponent of Visishtadvaita. On several occasions, Ramanuja made use of his services to win more and more followers. Thus the Ekadanda Mayavadi Sanyasin became an ardent supporter of the Vaishnava cult and philosophy.

8. Sri Bhashya, His Masterpiece

Ramanuja's Sri Bhashya on the Vedanta Sutras already ranks as a classic. It is a landmark in the philosophical writings of which any country may be proud. It is an outstanding contribution of his; so, it may rightly be called his *magnum opus*.

We have to consider why and how Ramanuja came to write his famous Sri Bhashya which bears the impress of his genius and learning. As we are already aware, it was one of the three wishes of Yamunacharya that Ramanuja, in defending the cause of Visihtadvaita, should undertake, at no distant date, the writing of Sri Bhashya, and

vindicate the cause of Vaishnavism. So Ramanuja in the midst of his activities as the head of the Srirangam Mutt, both as a teacher of Vaishnavism and as a reformer, addressed himself to the great task of writing the Sri Bhashya. Everybody was behind him in his supreme endeavour, and recognised the high importance and significance of his mission. For some years, he had been getting ready; at last he was prepared — experienced, and mature — and desired to serve the cause of Vaishnavism.

Before Ramanuja's time, Sankaracharya had composed his Bhashya. But it must be said that it was *not* the first work of its kind. In this connection, we have to bear in mind that the Visishtadvaita school of thought claims a respectable ancestry for its beginnings, commencing almost from the days of the great authors of the Sutras, Vyasa or Bodhayana. A great sage named Bodhayana composed a work called *Vritti*. A gloss on this work was later composed by Acharya Tanka. Another scholar named Dravidacharya wrote a fuller commentary which came to be called the Dravida Bhashya. Ramanuja wanted to get at the *Vritti* of Bodhayana, and for this purpose, he went to several places. As it was not available anywhere in South India, it is said he had to travel to Kashmir in the company of his followers, Kuresa, Embar, Mudaliyandan and Nadathur Amman. With a great deal of patience, he stayed at Srinagar for sometime

until he obtained permission to read the script although he was not allowed to take a copy of the same. Kuresa, who possessed an extraordinary memory committed the passage to heart, thus relieving Ramanuja of all anxiety as to being unable to take a copy of the work to Srirangam.

On Ramanuja and his followers returning to Srirangam, the master began composing his Sri Bhashya, Kuresa being the able scribe. It appears that Kuresa who remembered the *Vritti* never suggested any objection to his master's commentaries, but whenever there was any disagreement with the original passage, he simply stopped writing any further, until the master took the hint and corrected his exposition. Although Ramanuja managed to see the *Vritti*, it is unlikely that he went to Kashmir to see the *Vritti*. Perhaps he managed to get it from some ancient library in Northern India, but not exactly from Kashmir. Whatever may be the source for his work, the Sri Bhashya, remains today, as the composition of a master mind, and there is nothing wrong in supposing that his views, shaped by the ordeal of frequent discussions and controversies during his travels, were committed to writing, after his return. It seems that Ramanuja wrote only two-thirds of the Sri Bhashya, and the other and final portion of the work was completed after his return from Tirunarayananapuram in the Melkote Hills in

Mysore. We find in the Sri Bhashya all the special features of Vaishnavism incorporated, and it has thereby guided the succeeding generations of philosophers to spread the Visishtadvaita cult. By writing the Sri Bhashya, he not only fulfilled the first wish of Yamunacharya but also won world-wide fame.

9. His Digvijaya

Having firmly established the tenets of the Visishtadvaita school of thought, Ramanuja decided to go on a missionary tour round the Peninsula. His disciples too pressed him to undertake the trip to win the hearts of the masses of South India by offering them the religion of faith, love and prayer rather than of knowledge. As a reformer, he wanted to lead the masses, and to satisfy their wants as perhaps no one could do so. Several of his followers who were acquainted with the halting places in the peninsula and the various Vaishnava shrines and temples accompanied him.

Starting from Srirangam on an auspicious day, he first travelled north in the Chola country. He visited Kumbakonam and then worshipped at the various Vaishnava temples near Sirkazhi. Then he turned South and visited the famous shrines of Madurai; then he went further South in the Tinnevelly District and visited Azhvar Tirunagari, other-

wise called Tirukuruhur, sacred to the memory of Saint Satakopar.

While he was stopping at this sacred place, he wanted to perpetuate the memory of Saint Satakopar and thus fulfil another wish of Yamunacharya by naming Srisailapurna's son as *Tirukuruhai Piran Pillan*. Thus he paid his debt of gratitude to Saint Satakopar for his Tiruvaymozhi which consisted of the quintessence of the Brahma Sutras.

Ramanuja then visited Tirumalirumcholai, a famous Vaishnava shrine and there he recited several verses from Andal's Tiruppavai, and won the grace of the Lord. From here he travelled to Srivilliputhur, sacred to the memory of Periyazhvar, and his foster-daughter, Sri Andal.

From Srivilliputhur he went to Tirukottiyur and Tirumayam, and from there he went to see Sethu and bathed in the sea. Returning to Azhvar-tirunagiri, he visited Trivandrum, and later visited various shrines scattered all over Malabar.

Marching northward along the coast, he visited Girnar, and later Dvaraka in Sourashtra, where Sri Krishna had lived and ruled. He then decided to go further north and visited Muttra, Govardhan and other places, made sacred by the memory of Sri Krishna. After visiting these great pilgrimage-centres, he went up to the Himalayas—to Badrinath.

He then went to Kashmir and stopped at Srinagar. At this place, he is said to have been challenged by Sarasvathi, the Goddess of Learning. The passage which he was asked to interpret was a well-known passage in *Chandogya*, I. 6-7. *Yatha Kapyasam Pundarikam Evamakshini*. 'As is the Kapyasa Lotus, so were his eyes.'

Apart from the awkwardness of the comparison, it will be seen that it requires another word 'like', for which there is no place in the passage. The passage naturally implies, that *Kapyasa* is co-ordinate with *Pundarika*. Accordingly, Ramanuja gave up the traditional meaning and explained *Kapi* to mean the sun or sunlight. This was the best interpretation which he had learnt from one of the earlier commentators, *Vakyakara Tanka*. His full interpretation as given in the *Vedantha Sangraha* is as follows:—'The eyes of the Deity were beautiful like a (white) lotus, grown in deep water, standing on a strong stalk, and full-blown by the rays of the sun.'

This interpretation of the passage by Ramanuja pleased Sarasvathi very much and we are told that the Goddess blessed him and his *Sri Bhasya*. She called him, *Bhasyakara*. He then entered into a controversy with the *Advaita* teachers who, defeated in the controversy, thought of doing him harm. Owing to his victory, it is said that the king

of the country and his followers became Vaishnavites.

Having established his intellectual superiority, he descended from the Himalayas and reached Kasi, and stayed there for some time. From Kasi, he turned south-east and reached Puri or Jagannath, one of the most famous pilgrim centres of India. He established his Mutt at this place in order to serve the cause of Vaishnavism. He even tried to reform the mode of worship at the famous temple but failed in his attempt on account of the opposition of the Chief Priest there.

Turning southwards, Ramanuja and his disciples went to Kurmam and then visited Ahobilam near Nandyal and offered worship to Lord Lakshmi Narasimha. At this famous place, he established another Mutt of his, and to this day, it is administered by the Jeeyar of the Mutt.

The Controversy at Tirupathi

In between Ahobilam and Tirupathi, Ramanuja visited several shrines before he arrived at Tirupathi. As usual, he and his disciples climbed the Seven Hills and when they reached the temple, there they found to their great disappointment a keen controversy going on as to whether the God at the place was Vishnu or Siva. The Vaishnava community claimed that the God was only Vishnu in the years long before the arrival of Ramanuja; the Saivites

had never sung of the God at any time nor were there verses dedicated to the glory of the God of the Seven Hills although the neighbouring temples had verses sung in their honour. It also appears that in the days prior to Saint Satakopar, the God is said to be wearing Vaishnavite as well as Saivite symbols. This dispute thus caused a great sensation in the holy city. Perhaps during Ramanuja's visit, the Saivites tried to force the Vaishnavites out.

As one party came to challenge the other to scriptural discussions, Ramanuja suggested as a sort of compromise that the Siva and Vishnu Symbols should be placed before the God at night in the Garbha Gruha and the decision as to whether the God was Vishnu or Siva should be made from any indication that He may be pleased to give in this matter. This was agreed to by both the parties. The next morning, what was Ramanuja's joy to find that the God was wearing conch and discus, the symbols of Vishnu, not minding the symbols of Siva lying before him! Thus Ramanuja established, beyond any shadow of a doubt that the presiding God of the Seven Hills was only Maha Vishnu. He ended a great controversy which has never again disturbed the sanctity of the place; amidst shouts of 'Govinda, Govinda,' Ramanuja and his followers worshipped at the shrine.

After establishing the supremacy of his God, Ramanuja travelled south, visiting Kanchi,

Tirukoyilur and Tiruvayindai. From there, he visited Viranarayananapuram, sacred to the memory of Nathamuni. After a successful pilgrimage which lasted for years, Ramanuja and his party reached Srirangam. His other followers received him back with the greatest possible fervour. By his tour, he acquired great fame and widely increased his influence as a Vaishnava Preacher.

10. Persecution and Flight

Ramanuja was now an aged man, nearly seventy. As his years increased, his activities increased too. His popularity was immense, almost reaching its height after the Dugvijaya. With great ability, he managed the affairs of the temple at Srirangam through his faithful disciples; he also instructed them in the Visishtadvaita Philosophy. He won the affection of every one of his disciples and they all loved him and were devoted to him. As we are already aware, a son of Srisailapurna was brought up by Ramanuja as his spiritual son, and he was named Kurukesa, otherwise called Pillan. Soon after his return from the pilgrimage, Kurukesa, with Ramanuja's blessing, composed a brief but classical commentary called the Six Thousand on the thousand stanzas of the Tiruvaymozhi of Saint Satakopar.

Just about this time Kurukesa's wife gave birth to two sons. Ramanuja saw that he had his oppor-

tunity to fulfil his promise, the third pledge, made before Yamunacharya's funeral, and accordingly he named the first as *Parasara*, (the name of the great Vyasa's father) and the author of the *Vishnupurana*, a work of great fame; he named the second one as *Raman Pillai*, and entrusted both of them to Embar's care and attention.

Parasara grew up to be a brilliant Vaishnava Scholar and eventually composed some important works, one of them being a commentary on the *Sahasranama* called *Bhagavad Guna Darpana*.

Troublesome days were ahead for Ramanuja and it took a long time before he gained his lost ground in the Chola Country. About this period Rajendra Chola the Second, otherwise called *Kulothunga-I*, was the Chola King. He ruled from 1070 A.D. to 1118 A.D., for about fortyeight years, and due to his patronage Saivism began to spread. In his later days, Kulothunga I became a bigoted Saivite, and began to persecute the people of other creeds, chiefly the Vaishnavites. On the suggestion of the bigoted Saivites of his court, the king sent for Ramanuja to appear before him without any delay and asked him to subscribe to his Saivite view, '*Sivath Paratharam Nasthi*' ('there is no God superior to Siva.')

When the royal messenger went to Ramanuja's

mutt at Srirangam, the chief disciples of Ramanuja, Kuresa and others, suspecting some evil, decided not to send their master to the king's court as Sri Vaishnava Darsana would suffer very much by his absence. Instead, Kuresa, who dressed himself in Ramanuja's robes, made himself ready to answer the king's summons. The royal messenger, not knowing who Ramanuja really was, set out for the king's court in the company of Kuresa and Mahapurna, (who was Ramanuja's teacher). They all reached the Court at Chidambaram. One of the ministers forced Kuresa, in the midst of a heated discussion, to subscribe to the theory, *Sivath Paramtharam Nasthi*, and affix his signature as a token of his conversion to the Saivite faith. Instead of affixing his signature, Kuresa, ridiculed the idea and proclaimed that there existed a God who was ever superior to Siva. Upon this, the bigoted king lost his temper and commanded his servants to extract the eyes of the two Vaishnavites. When this was done, both of them were sent out. Kuresa, now blind and Mahapurna bent with age, started for Srirangam. Unable to bear any further suffering, Mahapurna died on the way and the blind Kuresa managed to reach Srirangam alone. When he found that, owing to persecution, Ramanuja and his congregation had evacuated the place, he travelled to Tirumalirumcholai in the Madurai District and lived near the shrine.

Ramanuja's Flight

In the meanwhile, in fear of persecution, Ramanuja, with a handful of disciples, left Srirangam before the royal messengers could come back again and find him out and mostly by travelling during night, reached the borders of the Nilgiris. The royal messengers, however, would not leave him in peace. They scattered themselves in all directions and made every effort to find him out. Fortunately, they were unable to pursue him for any length of time and returned to the capital, only to report that the Vaishnava congregation had left Srirangam for good.

It might be supposed that Ramanuja and his handful of followers could now feel that their position was quite secure. Yet there were great difficulties and dangerous adventures which they had to face. Afterwards, the party reached Vanhipushkarini, a place about forty miles west of Mysore city. Ramanuja halted here for a while and then resumed his journey.

Turning eastward, he went to Saligrama, a village near by. Here the people were not well disposed to the Vaishnavites because they were all bigoted Saivites. Ramanuja called the people of the town and explained to them the doctrines of Visishtadwaita. They discovered that there was something divine and sacred about him, and heard him not

only with profound attention but also with awesome respect. They showed a great deal of interest and understanding and soon became converts to Vaishnavism.

It was during his stay at this place, near Mysore that Ramanuja converted one Andhra Purna (Vaduga Nambi) to the Vaishnava faith. The convert became a devoted follower of Ramanuja thereafter.

It soon began to dawn upon the people of the place that Ramanuja was a teacher of great ideas. They were greatly impressed with his religious mind, its complexities as well as refinements. They attended his sermons regularly until he left the place for Tondanur. The party then reached Tonnur or Tondanur where resided King Bitti Deva of the Hoysala dynasty whose capital was at Dvara Samudra or Halebid as it is called now. The date of Ramanuja's arrival at Tondanur may be 1088 A.D. or 1089 A.D.

11. Ramanuja and Vishnuvardhana-I

"There are loyal hearts, there are spirits brave,
There are souls that are pure and true;
Then give to the world the best you have,
And the best will come back to you."

→ RALPH WALDO TRINE

The Hoysalas in whose country Ramanuja sought refuge, had their original home in the hill

of West Mysore. The earlier kings of the dynasty were all Jains and allies of the Chalukyas as against the Cholas. The most famous King no doubt was *Bittideva Vishnuvardhana* who ruled from 1104 A.D. to 1141 A.D.

At the time of Ramanuja's visit to Thondanur, King Bitti Deva and his Queen Santala were trying to get the best magicians and holy men in the land to cure their daughter who was possessed. They had tried unsuccessfully several ways as well as several persons in driving out the evil spirit that had possessed their daughter. On that account they were greatly distressed not knowing what to do. They banned all festivities in the palace until their daughter was thoroughly well.

It was just during this period of distress and agony that the Vaishnav devotee Tondanur Nambi was by chance able to contact Queen Santala Devi. He suggested to her that Ramanuja, the great apostle of Vaishnavism from Srirangam, could exorcise the devil by his superhuman powers, and that the great Sanyasin should be summoned forthwith. What better news could there be for the king and queen!

In a short time, this king and his queen and all his courtiers visited Ramanuja and begged of him to visit the palace and exorcise the devil which

had possessed their princess. Although Ramanuja was willing to comply with the king's request, he as a Sanyasin, disliked his paying a visit to the king's palace. When Thondanur Nambi and Mudaliyandan came to know of their master's hesitation to visit the palace, they pleaded with him to visit the palace for the cause of Vaishnavism and said, 'O Sir, may we submit that in the Melkote Hills there is the Thirunarayananapuram Temple which is under the authority of King Bitti Deva? To strengthen our cause, we may renovate it and make it the stronghold of Vaishnavism in the Western Country. Pray, visit the palace and serve our cause.' So Ramanuja was prevailed upon at last to visit the palace of Bitti Deva.

On Ramanuja entering the royal apartments, his disciples took the water consecrated by their master and asked the princess to drink a little. And lo! the princess was exorcised the next moment and looked most cheerful. Ramanujamuni had succeeded where others had failed.

Ramanuja, as suggested by his own disciples, took advantage of the opportunity to convert the King, a Jaina, to Vaishnavism. The King and Queen were pleased, and expressed their readiness to accept the new faith. Consequently Ramanuja initiated them to the Vaishnava faith, and in token of this conversion, he changed Bitti Deva's

name to Vishnu Vardhana by which name he is known to history.

When the leaders of the Jain community heard of their king's conversion to Vaishnavism, they, enraged by Ramanuja's action, marched to his lodgings and demanded of him as to how he could convert their King without defeating them all in a religious disputation. If only he could establish the superiority of his faith over theirs, they said, they could approve of his action.

A great polemic dispute then followed between the Jains and Ramanuja. He had all of them seated in a spacious Mantapa while he himself went inside a curtain. It is said that he took the form of the thousand-headed Adisesha, and answered each one so well that the crowd fled in terror and confusion. The King, on his conversion, we are told, deprived the Jain community of all its land-grants and allowed the Jain temples to go waste, apart from ill-treating them. Having won the favour and patronage of King Vishnuvardhana, Ramanuja established himself firmly at Thondanur. He constructed, from out of the ruined Jain temples, a large and beautiful lake which exists to this day.

One day, during his long stay in Mysore, Lord Tirunarayana, appeared before him and asked him to find out His image at Tirunarayananapuram in the Melkote Hills, some distance from Mysore.

Accordingly, Ramanuja and his disciples followed by King Vishnuvardhana travelled to the place in the midst of forests and to their surprise, found the big statue as revealed in the dream. With the King's patronage, he had a Vishnu temple built at Tirunarayananapuram (Yadugiri) and installed in it the God, amidst great rejoicings. Very soon there grew up a learned Vaishnava colony whose descendants exist to this day. It is said that Ramanuja discovered the idol by the side of the Kalyani Tank in Saka 1021. The Kalyani Tank attracts the visitors and many are the kings and queens, soldiers and statesmen who have bathed in its beautiful waters before entering the temple.

Vishnuvardhana helped Ramanuja in the renovation of this great place of pilgrimage. Queen Santala Devi struck a note of compromise between the Hindu and the Jain faiths. She proclaimed that Vishnu was her God for worship and Jainism was her favourite faith. Since the days of Vishnuvardhana, the temples of Melkote have been under the patronage of many Hindu and Mohamedan rulers who have enriched them with valuable gifts. After the conversion of the Hoysala King, Jainism gradually began to decline in Mysore and in its stead, Vaishnavism and other Hindu cults began to spread rapidly in several parts of the country. Under the influence of Ramanuja, orthodox

Hinduism began to grow and became popular in the country.'

12. Ramanuja and Vishnuvardhana-II

Although Ramanuja had discovered the image of Tirunarayana and built the temple in which he installed the Lord, he was distressed to find that he could not find the copper idol, *Ramapriya* of the same God, which was quite necessary for purposes of procession on festive occasions. He understood, in the course of a second dream, that the same was in the possession of a Mohamedan princess at Delhi. Having made up his mind to get hold of the copper idol, Ramanuja with a handful of his followers left for Delhi from Melkote.

After facing several difficulties on the way, he managed to reach Delhi. He went to the Sultan's palace, where he was received with due respect. When he asked the Sultan to return the copper idol, the Sultan informed him promptly that he had no objection if only the Sanyasin could make the idol come to him. Immediately he prayed to his Lord to come into his hands. At once the idol, *Ramapriya*, taking the form of a child bedecked with jewels came walking and sat on Ramanuja's lap. So great was Ramanuja's joy that he cried, 'O, my dear Selva Pillai! and pressed the idol to his bosom. He not only procured *Ramapriya* but

also the Lords' divine consort and returned to Tirunarayananapuram. He then had a temple built along with the Narayana temple and called the Lord, *Sampathkumara*. Ramanuja then celebrated all the festivals in honour of the Lord and appointed a committee of fifty-two Vaishnavas to look after the worship and management of the Temple.

Ramanuja had to face dangers on his way back from Delhi to Melkote. As some Panchamas came to his rescue and afforded him and the idols every kind of protection, he ordered that the untouchables should be given the privilege of entry into the temple for one day in each year, which privilege is enjoyed by them even to this day. He also called the untouchables by a new name, Tirukkulathar; of course there was Samprokshana soon after they left the temple.

Ramanuja then set up a mutt to propagate Vaishnavism, and to regulate worship in the temple of Sri Narayana and Sri Sampathkumara with the active help of the Vaishnava Vishnvardhana. Ramanuja drew up a plan to install the statues of Narayana in several parts of the Mysore country. His disciple, Mudaliyandan, was commissioned to do this work. He called the statues *Panchanarayana*, i.e., five Narayanas and all the five were installed in different places at the same time. At Talkad, the temple was named *Kirthinayana*; at Thondanur the temple was named

Srimannarayana, otherwise called Lakshmikantha; at Kathugal, it was called *Veeranarayana*; at Vijai-pura it was called *Vijayanarayana*, and at Belur, it was called *Kesava narayana*. King Vishnuvardhana endowed all these temples with gifts of land for love of the new faith to which he was converted.

Of all the temples built and renovated during the time of Rāmaṇuja, the Melkote temple is a protected monument under the Ancient Monuments Protection Act, 1904. A historian had described the temple in his book, 'Travels in Mysore,' as a 'square building of great dimensions, and entirely surrounded by a colonnade. The columns are very rude, and only about six feet high.... There is a mass of brick and mortar work excavated with numerous riches in which are huddled together many thousands of images of Hindu Deities.' Melkote, being a religious and cultural centre, a Samskrita college was established by one of the Maharajas of Mysore more than a century ago. The college, is, therefore, one of the oldest educational institutions in India.

Rāmaṇuja was firmly established at Melkote, thanks to Vishnuvardhana, and Vaishnavism grew remarkably in different parts of the country. But the conflicts between the various religious sects were not over by any means. It seemed to be God's will that he should take part in another religious

controversy, this time at Padmagiri (Sravana Belgola), the stronghold of Buddhists. So he travelled to Padmagiri, and there raged a fierce religious dispute between the two parties. He went all out to meet the arguments of his adversaries, and with his intellectual gifts, his devoted ardour and personal celebrity, won over them at last. A large number of Buddhists took great interest in Vaishnava religion and was converted to the new faith.

Meanwhile, a Vaishnava devotee who had been to Srirangam, returned to Melkote and apprised him of the death of the bigoted Saivite Chola King, from a carbuncle. Ramanuja also heard of the tragic death of his teacher, Mahapurna and the misfortunes of his faithful disciple Kuresa. So great was his grief that he began to weep in some instinctive manner. He decided to return to Srirangam with the least delay and express his condolences to Kuresa and his other disciples.

Without any further loss of time, Ramanuja sent one of his disciples to Srirangam and had the news of the king's death corroborated. He then, requested his disciples and admirers in Mysore to allow him to leave the country for Srirangam and he took leave of them all but not before he gave them an exact image of himself, which they installed in the temple for worship and Puja every

day. The idol of the great teacher that is being worshipped at the temple is called the *Atma Vigraha*.

So Ramanuja left Mysore for Srirangam in the company of his old and new disciples and travelling as fast as he could, reached Srirangam safely. His joy knew no bounds when the Vaishnavites of Srirangam came in thousands and welcomed him. He was taken in a grand procession to his Mutt amidst great rejoicings.

How long did Ramanuja stay in the Mysore country? There is one version that Ramanuja went westward (to Mysore) and stayed for twelve years, and this view is supported by the authors of 'The Six Thousand' and 'Divya Charita'. On the other hand, according to Guruparampara records, Ramanuja resided at Tondanur for twenty years. It is worthwhile arguing as to which is more reasonable and borne out by historical circumstances. There is no doubt that the bigoted Saivite King who persecuted the Vaishnavites died in Saka 1040, i.e., 1118 A.D. and his son Akalangan, otherwise called Vikrama Chola ascended the throne in A.D. 1118. Unlike his father, he was a pro-Vaishnavite, and he summoned Ramanuja to return to Srirangam. It was also necessary on the part of Ramanuja to stay at Melkote for such a long time as might be called for to establish his faith firmly; for, he had the patronage of King Vishnuvardhana

who lived till 1140 A.D. There is also the evidence of the author of 'Divya Charita' to the effect that Ramanujamuni lived for eleven years after his return to Srirangam before he was called to Eternal Rest. As it has been established that his life closed in A.D. 1137, we may infer that he must have stayed in the Mysore country between 1078 A.D. and 1120 or 1126 A.D. at the most. We can say in conclusion that his life ended after the death of Vikrama Chola and as soon as Kulothunga-II ascended the throne.

With the death of the bigoted Saivite Chola King and the accession of his son, Vikrama Chola, Ramanuja's cause brightened and began to prosper. The new King, a convert to Vaishnavism long before his accession, built several temples and shrines in Woriyur (near Trichy) and other places which exist to this day.

13. His Last Days

Before Ramanuja could settle down at last and live the rest of his years peacefully, he had to make yet another journey. The bigoted Saivite King, who persecuted the Vaishnavites thought fit, a few years before his death, to pull the Sri Govinda-raja Temple at Chidambaram. Some of the Vaishnavites had managed to get hold of the idol and preserve it carefully at Tirupathi until such time

as some great Vaishnava saint should come and build a Temple and install it. As there was none to prevent him from doing so, Ramanuja, inspite of his old age, left Srirangam for Tirupathi with some followers for the special task of establishing a shrine for Sri Govindaraja.

On going to Tirupathi, he collected the leading Vaishnavites and with characteristic energy managed to build a shrine for Sri Govindaraja at the foot of the hills and arranged for daily worship and Puja. Then he went up the Tirumalai Hills and after offering worship, came down and travelled back to Srirangam. There was none to challenge his supremacy and he settled down at last to spend his days in peace and prayer.

When he had completed his masterly work Sri Bhashya, the great Vaishnava devotee, Tiruvarangatthu Amudanar, in appreciation of Ramanuja's yeomen services, composed a work consisting of a hundred and eight stanzas under the name *Ramanuja Nooitranthathi* and won the approval of the great teacher as well as that of the other Vaishnavas. The work is held in great esteem by the Vaishnavas to this day, and it is part of the sacred 4000 verses in Tamil.

Ramanuja was soon joined by Kuresa, now completely blind and helpless. Very much distressed by Kuresa's blindness, Ramanuja implored

him to pray to the Lord of Kanchi to restore his eye-sight. Being unable to disobey his master's instructions, Kuresa prayed to the Lord but not for getting back his eye-sight. He told Ramanuja that he lost his eye-sight solely for the cause of Vaishnava Darsana and did not care to get it back. Kuresa, however, did not live long. He died shortly after and was deeply mourned by his master and all his colleagues. Thus ended the life of Kuresa who sacrificed his all for the sake of his faith.

Ramanuja spent the last years of his life in organisation and training his disciples for the work ahead of them. At intervals, he explained his Sri Bhasya. One day he took Parasara Bhattar with him to the temple and proclaimed to one and all that he would receive temple honours and become the head of the Peeta.

He selected seventyfour of his disciples who had been initiated into the great secrets of the Visish-tadvaita, and asked them to go forth to the people at large and preach the religion. He called them *Simhasanadhipathikal* (Ruler of the Vaishnava Faith) and authorised them to spread the new faith in every nook and corner of the land. They were directed to teach all those that came to them, so that the Vaishnava religion might grow and grow like a banayan tree and live in the world for ever. By his tireless energy and influence, he had estab-

lished two hundred colleges and twentyfour hereditary Guruships to preach and perpetuate his system of thought. Of all these mutts, those at Kanchi, Srirangam, Totadri, Ahobilam and Vannamalai are the most important. They are still continuing the work for which they were established, nine hundred years ago.

Years rolled by, and Ramanuja was feeling that his end was nearing. One day he entrusted the Sri Bhashya to his disciple, Piran Pillan, the commentaries on Tiruvaymozhi known as Bhagavad Vishaya to Tirukkurugai Piran Pillan and the Sri Sukthi to Parasara Bhattar. He commanded everyone of his disciples to accept Parasara Bhattar as the next Acharya, and obey him. Some people say that it was Embar who really succeeded Ramanuja, and not Parasara.

His End

The sands of time were running out fast and there were indications that his physical life was coming to an end. Kandadaiyandan, son of Mudaliyandan, one day begged of his master to give an image of his self in order that it might be installed at Sriperumbudur, his native town. Ramanuja readily agreed to his request. In a few days, Kandadaiyandan visited Sriperumbudur to install the image. As the image was to be installed in the

month of Pushya, all arrangements were made ready. On the day of installation, Ramanuja felt that his hour had come. It was a most solemn moment and he expressed his wish to walk into eternity. He rested his head on Embar's lap and his feet on Vaduganambi's and passed into eternity in 1137 A.D. Those that were by his side mourned for him and said, 'We have lost our greatest Acharya and Defender of Faith, and we are all the poorer and the lower by the loss.' Then they all thought in what way they could all show their love and veneration for their great Acharya.

Worship of the Acharya

In order to express their humble debt of gratitude, they decided that they should instal his image in a shrine in the Adikesavapperumal temple. They not only succeeded in achieving their object but also arranged for daily worship and Puja. There is a shrine where his image receives due homage, and thus his memory is commemorated today. Every year in the month of Chithra Adirai, a festival is celebrated for Ramanujacharya, the Defender of Faith. After sometime, Tirukkuruhaippiran Pillan, in memory of his master, had an image installed at Tirupathi. Every year, festivals are celebrated at Tirupathi, as elsewhere, in honour of Ramanujacharya.

After the death of Ramanujacharya, the Vaishnavites gathered at the Mutt, and in keeping with Ramanujacharya's wish, they all chose Parasara Bhattar, Kuresa's son, as the Acharya's successor. (This is not accepted by some scholars). Parasara also dedicated his life to the cause of Vaishnavism of which Ramanujacharya was the chief exponent.

14. His Works and Their Greatness

Mention has already been made of Ramanuja's *magnum opus* 'Sri Bhashya' and its great religious and philosophical value. Various points in Visish-tadvaita philosophy have been satisfactorily explained and determined. He himself says that his teaching is that of the Upanishads and that he follows the earlier commentators, since the time of Bodhyana Vritti. In his later days, while he was resting at Srirangam, he devoted most of his time in reading the Sri Bhashya and explaining it to his followers.

After the composition of his masterpiece, Ramanuja composed two small summaries of the same work, a short one called the *Vedanta Sara* consisting of the Sutras, and a simple paraphrase, and another work of the same type, but fuller in exposition called the *Vedanta Dipa*. These two compositions enable a reader to acquire a certain knowledge of the Brahmasutras, but they are

nothing compared to his masterly composition, Sri Bhashya.

Another work of the great Acharya is, of course, his *Geethabhashya*, which has been fully expounded by the classical commentary, *Tatparyā Chandrika* of Sri Vedantha Desika. It is said that Sri Vedantha Desika expounded the Sri Bhashya thirty times and on the twenty-eighth occasion, composed a work *Tatvatika*, a great commentary on the Sri Bhashya. This illustrates the great popularity of Sri Bhashya and Geetha Bhashya of Ramanujacharya.

The other compositions of Ramanujacharya are *Vedartha Sangraha*, *Gadya Traya* and the *Nitya*. *Vedartha Sangraha* is a running commentary on the Vedavakyas. *Gadya Traya* is an account of Saranagathi, Sriranga and Srivaikunta. We may, however, say that the *Vedartha Sangraha* helps us in a way to add to the information given by Yamunacharya on ancient writers and their valuable commentaries on the Brahma Sutras.

Although by himself, Ramanuja did not write any commentary on Saint Satakopar's *Tiruvaymozhi*, it was he who gave great impetus to the task of writing on the *Tiruvaymozhi* (Bhagavad Vishaya). When Saint Satakopar's work came to be studied critically by the people of South India, there grew up a school of combined Tamil and Sanskrit learning. As days passed, it developed in

importance in later days. Consequently, the Vaishnava community came to be divided into sects, the Northern sect called the Vadakalai and the Southern sect called the Tenkalai. It must be mentioned that it was only in Ramanuja's time, that the first commentary on the *Tiruvaymozhi* was written by a disciple of his, Kurukesa, otherwise called Pillan.

The hymns of the Azhvars, thanks to the efforts of Ramanujacharya, are not only sung in the Vaishnava temples but are also recited by thousands of Vaishnavas every day in their homes. That even Non-Brahmin Azhvars are held in high esteem and that their sweet hymns are daily sung by the most orthodox of Sri Vaishnava Brahmins is evidence enough that the Vaishnava faith preached by the great Ramanujacharya was universal. Thus, by his own works and those of his disciples, Ramanuja made Vaishnavism a religion of the masses.

The Teachings of Ramanuja and His Greatness

'Philosophy', says Sir Charles Eliot, 'is more closely connected with religion in India than in Europe'. This statement is certainly true of South India, because of the rise of the Acharyas who were responsible for the great religious revival and the systems of philosophical thought evolved by them from time to time. The doctrine of Bhakti, it must

be pointed out, spread from the south to the north although it did not end there. Therefore, Ramanujacharya was responsible for this great religious revival in the 12th century. He developed, as already pointed out, the Visishtadvaita system, which can be called Vaishnavism.

‘Visishtadvaita’ means, the ‘Advaita’ or oneness of God, with ‘Visesha’ or attributes. It is, therefore, called ‘Qualified non-dualism’. According to it, God alone exists; all else that we see is God’s attribute or manifestation.

The *sine qua non* of Sri Ramanujacharya’s system is the doctrine of the organic relationship of soul-body (*Sarira-Sarirabhava*) and his doctrine furnishes the key by which he solves the contradiction of Sruti, reasoning and perception, the three ultimate provinces of experience. In the words of Dr. Radhakrishnan, ‘Ramanuja regards the relation of God to the world as one of soul to body; brings out the organic and complete dependence of the world in God.’ The philosophy of Ramanuja is a synthesis of metaphysical moral and religious experience and takes root in the thought that Brahman is the ground of existence, as well as the goal of existence. God, according to Ramanuja, is thus a personality whose infinite content cannot be exhausted by the forms of finite experience but who pours out His unlimited love in his personal relations with the

finite self. To Ramanuja, the absolute is the personal God and the chief aspiration of the *Jiva* is the realization of God as the self. So spiritual service is the highest form of religious devotion.

In contradiction to Sankaracharya's doctrine, Ramanujacharya held that the divine soul (Paramatma) and the human (Jivatma) are one, not absolute but are closely connected. The distinctive part of his teaching, in the words of Monier Williams is: 'Everlasting happiness is to be attained not by knowledge alone; a devout observance of public and private worships is also enjoined.' In his teaching, 'there is the assertion of the existence of a triad of principles, *viz.*, 1. the Supreme Being (Isvara). 2. the Soul (Chit) and 3. the Non-Soul (Achit). Vishnu is the Supreme Being; individual spirits are souls and the visible world is the non-soul. All these have an external existence distinct from each other. With the other Vaishnava leaders, Ramanuja believed and taught that devotion to and faith in Vishnu superseded all distinctions of caste.

Ramanuja's Sri Bhashya is noteworthy for the lengthy discussion on various topics by which his commentary on the Sutras is preceded. In this discussion, he treats of various points of difference with Advaita philosophy and expounds them fully. One of the important points is his statements of

objections to Sankaracharya's theory of *Maya or Avidya* which is an essential feature in Advaita philosophy. Is this Avidya different from or identical with Brahman (Intelligence)? The theory of Maya is the most vulnerable point in Advaita philosophy. Ramanuja expounds at great length the difficulties as to the tenability of the theory of Maya or Avidya. He argues that Avidya cannot operate on the Brahman directly; for, it is Intelligence. Nor can it operate on the individual soul; for, these are the outcome of the action of Avidya and cannot, therefore, be acted upon in anticipation. On account of all these reasons, Ramanujacharya concludes that the theory of *Maya* is untenable and opposed to the spirit of the Vedic texts.

There are also other differences of opinion between the two systems of philosophy on the state of Brahman, the purpose of creation etc. It is not the object of this small book to explain all the objections of Ramanujacharya to Sankara's Advaita philosophy. Only such of those principles of the Visishtadvaita as is necessary to understand Ramanuja's teachings have been explained briefly. It is very difficult to decide who of the two has given a better interpretation of the Upanishads and who has more correctly understood and interpreted the Brahma sutras. It is also beyond our scope and

capacity to do so. Dr. Paul Deussen says that the system of the Vedantha as expounded by Sankara—equal in rank to Plato and Kant—is one of the most valuable products of the genius of mankind in his researches of the eternal truth. It must be said to the credit of Ramanujacharya that he evolved a system of philosophy based on the Upanishads and Vedantha Sutras full of the hardest contradictions, even as Sankara did. He has his own pride of place among the philosophers of the world; his Visishtadvaita 'though not having the universality of Sankara's system, is yet an eminently sound one, compatible with an admission of the reality of the cosmos, and a high conception of the nature and attributes of the Deity.'

Philosophers like Dr. Thibaut have pointed out that there is nothing sectarian in the philosophy of Ramanuja. Devotion to one God, in practice, was the teaching of South Indian Vaishnavism. The rapid conversion of a large portion of the masses to Vaishnavism beyond the reach of Brahmanism is a characteristic feature of the Ramanuja School.

It must be said to the credit of the great Acharya that the lower classes of the Hindu society were brought into the faith by the works of the Azhvars, twelve in number, for religious purposes, and secondly by the doctrine of *Prapatti* or surrender

to one God for which no status of caste or creed was demanded.

For a century and a half after the death of the great Sankaracharya, Advaita continued to be the religion of the South. But the strict asceticism, self-mortification and austerity which Sankaracharya enjoined had excluded the masses from the pale of his policy. The common masses could not understand his abstract conceptions. It was Ramanujacharya who presented a religion of love and redemption through Bhakti and prayer rather than of knowledge to the common masses at large. As it has already been said, "by preaching this universal love of Vishnu, he brought to them such a God as they were yearning for." This was the chief reason for the success of Ramanujacharya in this mission.

The special influence of Vaishnavism on the people of South India needs mention. The Visish-tadvaita system had great influence a thousand years ago even as it has today. In the first place, it let loose its hold on its followers on the smaller Gods and Goddesses. There are several works which bear testimony to the large number of ceremonies and fasts observed by the Hindus. Now dynamic Vaishnavism prevented the observance of such ceremonies and enjoined on them to worship only their personal God, Narayana, the Protector of all things. Secondly as has already been speci-

fically pointed out, the people who were beyond the pale of Brahminism were brought to the Vaishnava fold. This is a characteristic feature of the South Indian Vaishnavism of which Ramanujacharya was the founder, although we find the seeds in the earliest times. The existence of Vaishnavism as a dynamic religious cult today is mostly due to the dynamic personality of Ramanujacharya. Visistadvaita as an exposition of the religion of the Vedanta is particularly associated with Ramanujacharya.

“Religion,” says R. W. Trine, “in its truest sense is the most joyous thing the human soul can know, and when the real religion is realised, we shall find that it will be an agent of peace, joy and of happiness and never an agent of gloomy, long-faced sadness. It will then be attractive to all and repulsive to none.” Let the followers of Visishtadvaita philosophy grasp these great truths; let them give their time, and attention to bringing people into a knowledge of their true selves, into a knowledge of their relations, of their oneness with their Lord, and such joy will be the result and such crowds will flock to them, that their homes will almost seem to burst.

Greatness of Ramanujacharya

The fame of philosophers, especially in a large country like India with several religions existing from ancient times, is much affected by the swing

of the pendulum of religious taste of the masses. Ramanujacharya had such an exemplary character that he attracted the common man both by precept and example. He was broadminded and generous, and no wonder he was not only popular as the head of the Mutt—he was the fourth Acharya to occupy the Peeta at Srirangam,—but also well-known to the masses. Perhaps the greatest of the Vaishnava reformers known in the history of South India, he was never known to be harsh on anybody—be it at Srirangam, or Melkote. As a reformer with great vision, he recognised merit and ability, be it persons of low birth, witness for example, his great love and consideration for Kanchipurna.

He also possessed a familiarity with ordinary men and women which was invaluable to discern their thoughts and feelings. The characteristic feature of the Acharya was his ability to understand human nature. Besides, the felicity of powerful expression, and the subtle power of thought, all can be found in his works to stamp him as an intellectual giant. Even his severest critic dare not deny the fact that Ramanujacharya was a man of wonderful courage and truth.

As the leader of a particular Hindu sect, he had several times to participate in religious controversies and disputations. Although he carried all before him in all these disputations, he was never harsh

or uncharitable in his attacks on his opponents. On the other hand, they were so much impressed by his gentle but firm exposition of the Visishtadvaita philosophy.

That he was a great administrator needs no special mention. For, the activities of this extraordinary man as a reformer of the temples, and as an organiser of Mutts, and colleges were great and varied. He ruled over his disciples with the zeal of a born administrator, although he was an Acharya, first and last.

As an Acharya and teacher of the Visishtadvaita philosophy, he threw himself into every kind of work that would bring the common man to his feet; he delivered innumerable discourses and sermons; he produced his great works; he made others too produce a series of devotional literature.

It is mostly on account of Ramanujacharya's energy and initiative that thousands of Vaishnava temples and shrines came to be built all over South India; it is also due to his great power of organisation that these temples still continue to be centres of religious and cultural influence.

Ramanuja's many-sided activities as a Vaishnava Acharya and reformer bore fruit in other places such as Bengal. One of his disciples greatly influenced the famous teacher, Ramananda, who

preached Vaishnavism and Bhakti to thousands of persons in Northern India.

Ramanujacharya continued to inspire his successors by his magnetic vigour even after his death. His work in later days was taken up by Sri Vedanta Desika, a descendant of one of his disciples. Ramanujacharya's name stands with the names of Sankaracharya, and Sri Krishna Chaitanya, and most of his followers firmly think that he was an incarnation of the thousand-headed Adi Sesha along with the five symbols of Maha Vishnu.

Conclusion

Nearly a thousand years ago came Ramanujacharya who even now is adored and revered perhaps, as no other human being has ever been worshipped. Various philosophers and men of learning have paid tributes to the founders of their respective faiths but the tribute paid to Ramanujacharya is something unparalleled. What influence and power he had during his life time can only be realised by recalling to our mind the great influence that Gandhiji wielded during his life-time. Such a great personality comes once in one thousand years and will live for ever. Verily Ramanuja was Godlike in his love and kindness to all.

In conclusion, we shall pray to Sri Ramanujacharya, the Acharya of Acharyas, to give us the

dge, lead us on the path of the
nd take us in the end to our final
ernal happiness.

गम्भीराः रामात्मजमुनेगिरः ।
देन स्वं भावमस्तिलं ध्रुवम् ॥

hing of Ramanuja Muni, profound
l, for certain, its inner meaning in all
s own grace!

**Chief Events in Ramanuja's Life and
Their Dates**

| | | |
|---|---|--------------------------------------|
| 1 | Birth of Ramanuja-charya .. | 1017 A.D. (Saka 939) |
| 2 | At the academy of Yadavaprakasa .. | 1033 A.D. |
| 3 | Visit of Ramanuja-charya to Srirangam to meet Yamunacharya | 1042 A.D. |
| 4 | Ramanujacharya turns Sanyasin .. | 1049 A.D. |
| 5 | Stay at Melkote on account of the persecution of Kulothunga I | After 1078 A.D. and before 1120 A.D. |
| 6 | Conversion of Bitti Deva to Vaishnavism | 1098 A.D. |
| 7 | Installation of God Naryana at Melkote by Ramanujacharya .. | 1100 A.D. |
| 8 | Death of Ramanuja-charya | 1137 A.D. (Saka 1059) |

A List of the Names and Styles Conferred on Ramanuja

| | Name and Title | Conferred by |
|---|--------------------|---------------------------------|
| 1 | Ramanujar .. | Sri Sailapurna |
| 2 | Ilayazhvar .. | -do.- |
| 3 | Yathirajar .. | Lord Varadaraja of Kanchi |
| 4 | Udayavar .. | Lord Ranganatha of Srirangam |
| 5 | Emberumanar .. | Ghoshtipurna |
| 6 | Sribhashyakarar .. | Goddess Sarasvathi |
| 7 | Nangkoil Annar .. | Sri Andal |

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- 1 SIR CHARLES ELIOT—*Hinduism and Buddhism*
- 2 T. RAJAGOPALACHARI—*The Vaishnavite Reformers of India*
- 3 S. SRINIVASA IYENGAR—*The Life of Sri Ramanuja* (1931)
- 4 M. D. NAIDU—*Life of Emberumanar* (1958)
- 5 ANON—*Kanchi and Its Vicissitudes*
- 6 DR. S. K. AYYANGAR—*Early History of Vaishnavism*
- 7 P. N. SRINIVASACHARI—*Ramanuja's Idea of the Finite Self*
- 8 R. GOPINATHA RAO—*History of Srivaishnavas*

BHAGAVAN RAMANUJA

APPRECIATION

“ You have laid emphasis on the universality of his philosophy and you have referred to the doctrine of “Prapatthi” as also the fact that it was Sri Ramanuja who spread the true message of Vaishnavism to the people at large irrespective of caste, creed and sect. I am sure the book will be an useful addition to the literature on the subject.”

--- W.S.KRISHNASWAMI NAYDU,
Madras High Court Judge (Retd.)

“ Sri R. Padmanabhan’s book on ‘Bhagavan Ramanuja’ will be useful to the young men and women in our educational institutions intent on knowing what Sri Ramanuja taught and stood for It was given to Sri Ramanuja to interpret this world of men and things as the very body of God wherein he dwells as the *Antaryamin*. The world has yet to learn the profundity of this doctrine, for, otherwise, it would have taken religion a little more seriously.”

--- Dr.T.M.P. MAHADEVAN,
Director (Retd.), Centre for Advanced Philosophy,
University of Madras



THE LITTLE FLOWER CO.

New No.36, North Road, West C.I.T.Nagar
CHENNAI - 600 035.

Ph : 24341538 / 24336467 Fax : 044-24310659
E-mail : info@lifcobooks.com Website : www.lifcobooks.com

